

Grant Proposal Report from Task Force

Recommendation: Fund with condition that items referenced below (Conditions/Corrections) are resolved before the application is submitted. Grant award of CNCS funds to be no more than \$158,350. The grantee share is not budgeted or reported under Fixed Amount awards so there is no required match. Reimbursement is based on hours served by members.

Legal Applicant: University of Southern Maine:
Maine Campus Compact

Program Name: Maine Energy AmeriCorps Program

Category: ☒ AC Formula -- Standard
☐ AC Formula -- Rural State
☐ AC Competitive
☐ Other Competition

Type: ☐ Planning
☐ Operating
☒ Fixed Amount
☐ Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Environmental Stewardship

Applicant type: ☐ New (no prior AC experience)

☒ Re-compete (# of yrs: 3)

Proposed Dates: 12/01/2020 to 11/30/2021*

* Maine higher ed institutions are not expecting a campus-based fall semester

Requested Resources: Funds and Slots (*indicates sections with calculation errors)

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	Budget not required		N/A
Member Support	Budget not required		N/A
Indirect (Admin)	Budget not required		N/A
CNCS Award amount	\$158,350	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	N/A
% sharing proposed	N/A		N/A
% share required	N/A		N/A
Cost-per-member proposed	\$15,479 (\$15,479 allowed)		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years: 10.23	Slot Types Requested						
	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT		Total
Slots With living allowance	6						6
Slots with only ed award					20		20

Program Description (executive summary):

Maine Campus Compact's Maine Energy AmeriCorps Program (formerly known as the Maine Partnership for Environmental Stewardship) proposes to have 6 Full Time (FT), and 20 Minimum Time (MT) AmeriCorps members (totaling 10.23 MSYs) at 6 host sites who will partner with community organizations and higher education institutions to affect individual behavioral and technical change leading to energy efficiency, particularly for economically disadvantaged individuals and households in Maine. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for hosting a total of 12 (2 per site) Community Energy Education Events, 6 (1 per site) Window Insert Community Builds (600 interior storm window inserts built and installed into 108 homes), and conducting at least 360 Home Energy Visits (including dorms) that encourage greater behavioral change in energy conservation. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 240 volunteers who will be engaged in supporting these community energy efficiency initiatives. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area of Environmental Stewardship. The CNCS investment of \$158,350 will be matched with \$145,113 in private funding.

Service locations:

- 4 unknown
- Bangor/Orono
- Lewiston

The 6 host sites will be primarily at college campuses that have strong ties to their surrounding communities and where there is demonstrated community need. The remaining sites are anticipated to be recruited from the following areas: Western lakes region, Biddeford/Portland, and rural towns Downeast or in northern counties. The purpose of the campus/community partnership is to leverage the resources on campuses (student volunteer groups, faculty expertise, meeting space) while also encouraging campuses to be more energy efficient.

Other than the legal applicant, please list the agencies or organizations that appear to be the major collaborators or partners in this grant.

University of Maine System, Efficiency Maine, Window Dressers, partners in Lewiston and Bangor/Orono

Will the applicant place AmeriCorps members with other agencies? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Within a single municipality | <input type="checkbox"/> Within a single County but not covering the entire County |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County-wide in a single County | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Counties but not Statewide <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Statewide |

Performance measures (targets proposed for Year 1; targets for years 2 and 3 set in continuations):SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: EN1: Number of housing units or public structures weatherized or retrofitted

Proposed target: 108

OUTCOME: EN1.1: Number of housing units/structures with reduced energy consumption or reduced energy costs
Proposed target: 108

OUTPUT: EN3: Number of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship
Proposed target: 240

OUTCOME: EN3.1: Number of individuals with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship
Proposed target: 180

OUTCOME: EN3.2: Number of individuals reporting a change in behavior or intention to change behavior
Proposed target: 144

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT (measures listed in the RFP not entered and targets were not proposed)

CAPACITY BUILDING (measures listed in the RFP not entered and targets were not proposed)

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Design		
Need	Adequate	2.68
Theory of Change, Evidence & Logic Model	Adequate	16.08
Evidence tier – category points	Preliminary tier, Weak	2.31
Evidence quality	Weak	2.64
Notice Priority	Adequate	0.67
Member Experience	Adequate	4.02
Organizational Capability		
Organizational Background & Staffing	Strong	3
Compliance/Accountability	Strong	10
Member Supervision	Adequate	4.02
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	16.75
Evaluation Plan	Strong	n/a
Total Peer Reviewer Score		68.17

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Model	Adequate	10.05
Past Performance	Adequate	10.05
Financial Plan	Adequate	6.7
Fiscal Systems	Strong	10
Total Task Force Score		36.8
Peer Review Score		68.17
Final Score for Applicant		104.97

Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Forward or fund with no corrections/modifications
- ☒ Forward or fund with corrections/modifications
- ☐ Do Not Forward or fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

The following narrative issues need to be clarified or, in the case of missing required elements, added.

- Submitted Evaluation Plan does not meet standard – as submitted it is a data management plan for collecting Performance Measure data. It does not propose evaluation questions or strategies to answer those questions.
- Four of six planned partners sites are not yet identified. Concern regarding this fact would be mitigated by a better description of the 18-school partnership Maine Campus Compact represents on p.2 when sites arrangements are addressed.
- There are a number of Performance measure related issues:
 - Member Development and Capacity Building PM's were not submitted

- Performance measures cite “post assessments” for trainings and the narratives regularly reference pre & post assessments. Contradiction needs to be sorted.
- E3.3 measure does not align with description of measurement in narrative. Performance measure cites follow-up surveys or data collection immediately following training events. Narrative (p.7) describes surveys and data collection beyond training events. The logic model also indicated that some training participants will go on to request home visits and window inserts – this is a demonstration of the behavioral change that should be measured in this PM
- The problem statement is repeated for both performance measures but should be different
- It is unclear how low-income beneficiaries and low-income members will be identified – what metrics will be used to determine this status, when will it be collected and how will the information be kept confidential.
- Logic model in Row 8 is inconsistent. It identifies a training for full-time members but includes the full complement of 26 positions as benefiting from the training
- Some narrative references are unclear. “Community Concepts” agency is not adequately described – function is unclear. Source of \$27/year calculation is unclear. In Narrative it is ascribed to Window Dressers, and, in a separate section, to a University Professor. Reference to professor is also mentioned in Perf Measure section.
- Narrative describes site specific Advisory Councils as “informal” but they are a key element of the logic model and required by AmeriCorps regulation. They need to be more formal given the role(s) ascribed to them.
- Submitted Organizational Chart is somewhat confusing as it does not include the USM Office of Sponsored Programs, which directly oversees the grant and compliance
- SAM registration expires on July 1. Need assurance it will be renewed immediately so the Formula award is not held up.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design. *This section covers the community need, service to be performed in response to need, evidence the service will be effective, roles for AmeriCorps and partners, performance measures, and anticipated results for year one.*

Need

- The narrative provided reliable and credible sources for evidence of the need.
- Information about Maine’s low income and elderly are not new, and the people in these categories are not a “community.” Some sites in the proposal are not named.
- Surely for the areas in which they work there would be more information about the local housing stock.
- Want them to make a much clearer case for the way in which the way weatherization and aging at home is beneficial for Maine residents. Need to tie everything together.

Theory of change and logic model

- Hands on programs, training of members – volunteers to teach homeowners and renters to increase efficiency. 4 part set up
- Expected results are listed for the sites
- 6 Sites noted – but only 2 are identified, other 4 are anticipated – more work needs to be done to this area.
- No partners listed, just assumed partner in narrative but no one solid.
- Plans to put program into place soon after funding are weak. Didn’t even name the 2 definite sites.
- The narrative addressed the items in the theory of change narrative with a solid plan and defined outcomes. By work with community
- agencies, they will assist existing efforts put forth by those agencies. The logic model supported the narrative and hit the required points.
- Finding partners downeast is going to take work and time.

- I am wondering sometimes what the program is measuring as they hop from low income student projections, elderly people being able to stay in their homes, and what happens to people in their events. I also wonder if there are actual statistics to back up the proposition that students who volunteer on college campuses are more likely to stay in Maine to work.
- Concerned they are putting in the grant application without knowing which UMaine campuses will host. Given the campuses are in known places, they should have been able to better describe the potential customers and housing stock around those places. Data missing.

Evidence Tier

- The proposal narrative utilized and referenced prior studies and included evidence from prior program implementation.
- The program purports to be designed to improve energy efficiency in low income persons' homes, but the studies do not say whether or not the studies were done in the homes of low income people.
- The applicant did not claim to fit any evidence tier and did not argue that their evidence supported that choice.

Evidence Quality

- The evidence reports submitted showed a satisfactory methodological quality. Evaluations were submitted from the 2018-2019 program year and indicated positive change.
- Unclear from evidence description what they were trying to accomplish.
- The narrative cited a 2008 study which is fairly old. They cited their own results of pre/post surveys in the program they are operating but didn't describe the data to say if the results were statistically significant. No numeric results to bolster claim.

Notice Priority

- MEAP falls under National Service Environmental Stewardship
- The proposal fits within the CNCS funding priorities, but not the priority areas listed for this competition.
- The summary cites the need for low income elderly to have energy interventions but does not carry this through the document. This is much more about energy conservation than keeping elderly people at home.
- Did not speak to how weatherization and supports connect to this program. There are so many organizations in communities working on one or another of these issues. They never tied them together and explained why this program does not compete or integrate.

Member Experience

- Members will train on multiple topics from AmeriCorps policies to community building and leadership. RFP lays out the # of trainings for both full members and partial members as well as the volunteers
- AmeriCorps training will cover all areas in the assessment criteria for FT members. There will be continued training, both in person and virtual, throughout the term of service that will allow for self-reflection. My only concern is that MT members will receive much of this training through the "train the trainer" model, learning from FT members. While this approach can be effective, I am concerned that the MT members may not receive the same quality of training, or the same information. Will there be a set training manual that the FT members will use to train the MT members?
- Member experience is described in generalities, not specifics. The marketable skills claim is not fully substantiated. "Green energy jobs" are an up and coming category, but is building storm windows adequate preparation for a profession?
- Talked about training but did not cover all the criteria listed.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- MEAP is part of MCC is a fiscal partner with USM but has its own board of directors. MCC's Executive Director, Program Director, Administrative Specialist will oversee the MEAP program.
- Board meets four times a year, they are given a review of the programs and strategies.
- The organization's board is involved in oversight of the efficacy of the programs and strategies of the organization, to include the AmeriCorps program. The organization has a 26-year history of operations, to include management of federal grants such as VISTA and U.S. EPA, as well as the AmeriCorps State program. Supervision from the organization equals 1 FTE.
- People in charge of the overall program seem qualified but site supervision is lacking.

Compliance and Accountability

- Strong set up for monitoring the staff, even before they are official with background checks. Site visits, checking and reporting will help alert any issues of risk and will be mitigated
- The application describes a thorough process of oversight, to include site visits, frequent member trainings, and frequent member contact. They describe a strong relationship with the host sites and site supervisors, including a strong training plan.

Member Supervision

- Program will be supervised by onsite supervisors as well as having the program director doing site visits. Multiple
- levels of training for supervisors and staff
- Members will receive strong and frequent supervision from well trained site supervisors. The organization will check in with host sites through compliance visits and phone conversations. Members will be given training in the areas of communication, outreach strategies, and professionalism.
- Can't possibly describe the qualifications of supervisors who will work with members because they haven't identified all the sites where members will be placed.
- Member supervision is the most important part of the program for the member.
- Plan for check-ins, training supervisors, and doing site visits is well laid out.
- For a program that is three years old, it is odd they do not have a better plan for what sites will host members.

Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness. (CNCS no longer allows narrative for this section. They directed reviewers to consider the budget narrative and its formulas, accuracy, expense items.)

Section: Cost and Budget Adequacy (25 %)

- \$145,113 in proposed and secured funds, with most being secured and \$10K being proposed.
- Cost for MSY is exact to RFP to \$15,479. Doesn't look like a lot of cash match.
- This is a fixed-amount grant and they are requesting the maximum amount per MSY.
- Provided only basic information. Not particularly strong.

Section: Evaluation Plan Feedback

- Good data collection plan but not clear if the evaluation criteria apply because the text didn't outline evaluation.
- MEAP will be evaluated under the MCC's history of assessment. Programs will have evaluations based on outcomes.
- Evaluation support from DIP. MEAP will use performance measures to evaluate the program success. Participants will be given surveys to fill out/ Comparison between pre and post surveys will be completed. Lots of tracking of data

- Budget is not addressed,
- The narrative states specific program measures that will be used, and how they will be used. Data collection will be conducted through a planned process after each activity.
- There will be plenty of empirical evidence as workshops are held and windows are built.
- Committing to use a third party and not do internal evaluation.

Comments on likelihood of being successful:

- Although, I feel that this is a strong proposal that is very well laid out, it's missing one element. The sites, it states there will be 6, but only 2 are identified, and 4 are anticipated. When will the other 4 be identified? Will the FSJ go towards finding the remaining locations rather than working to help the communities with energy improvements?
- The applicant has prior experience with this program and shared data from their 2018-2019 surveys, indicating an increase in knowledge about energy efficiency and motivation to change behavior in order to conserve energy on behalf of the participants of the program.
- Just the basic thing on adding storm windows to single pane windows will save energy, and therefore money for all of us. I am concerned however, that many low-income Maine persons will be reluctant to attend workshops geared to "low income" people. We are a dignified people.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The remaining sites
- I think there could have been a much more specific relationship drawn between the priority focus of healthy futures and energy conservation. It feels like there is only lip service to that concern.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- Overall, this proposal is well laid out and includes a lot of good information and research
- I think it would be beneficial to the MT members to have at least one phone call check-in to discuss problem areas and professionalism.
- This is especially true if these members are to be trained for entry into the green workforce. These are skills that can be useful in their future careers or future training opportunities.
- My concern about this proposal is that I think nearly everyone in the world would like to make their homes more energy efficient. There will be obvious cost savings when people put plastic inserts in their windows. But this proposal does not address the more basic question of substandard housing in which too many low-income elderly live. And now that we see the life endangering conditions of congregate living and nursing homes, it might be even more beneficial for this program to pivot, and put more emphasis on those wellness visits.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. *This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and it's demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.*

- While almost adequate there is information that needs to be included to make this a stronger application and increase the possible successful outcomes of this program. While there are many unknowns beyond the control of the Applicants and flexibility regarding detailing the specific sites must be allowed, that coupled with the specific concerns detailed in the staff review leads me to think that resolution of those concerns should be required to move forward. I want this to be productive and successful.
- Energy costs are a significant issue for low-income Maine resident home-owners due to the relatively high percentage of income that goes to this expense category. In some instances, this can impact the ability of residents to age in place. The situation is further aggravated by the general age of buildings in Maine. Buildings in Maine also contribute a significant percentage of greenhouse gases emitted in the state both due to the reliance on fuel oil and inefficiency of older structures. Applicant presents sufficient data to

support the premise that energy efficiency improvements are needed in Maine, particularly for older, low to moderate income residents.

- Environmental stewardship is a CNCS focus area. It is not, however, a focus area for this MCCC competition. Applicant does attempt to make a connection to aging in place; however, this seems to be more of a potential side benefit to the program rather than a focus of it. The emphasis is on an external focus through supporting low income community members. This is strengthened, at least in the Lewiston area, through the partnership with Community Concepts, the local Community Action Agency that focuses on services to low income residents. We have seen similar proposals to this from the Maine Campus Compact, and I've been skeptical regarding the long-term effect of behavioral education on energy conservation, being much more supportive of structural fixes such as insulation, more efficient heating systems; energy conserving appliances, etc. While the effort continues to support behavioral changes, it also now seems to be adding a stronger focus on informing residents of weatherization and other energy conservation support programs for which they may be eligible. While window inserts can be an appropriate conservation measure, others, such as enhanced insulation, generally provide a greater return on investment. To the extent that those impacted by the program are informed of and take advantage of other such programs, the ultimate goal of the project is more likely to be reached.
- Some comments on the secondary emphasis on economic opportunity through training members for potential entry into green energy jobs. This proposal seems to expand past efforts by doing more outreach into the community in an attempt to provide individuals with information about green job opportunities as well as to recruit AmeriCorps members from among the low/moderate income community. This is a good addition to the program which, in the past, seemed to focus more on recruiting college students. Goal of 216 volunteers. Should be feasible given the commitment of various schools to voluntary community engagement and the involvement of local partner agencies such as Community Concepts.
- I do note that only two of the six proposed locations have been identified and that the peer reviewers expressed concerns that all were not in place. Given the projected start date of December 2020 and the current pandemic emergency, I am not as bothered by this unless the emergency negatively impacts the ability of higher education institutions reopening in the fall. That could pose a concern.
- Every time I see this proposal, it appears to be stronger. I would have graded it higher in this area if it was addressing a key Commission priority.

Assessment of Past Performance

- I am being positive and optimistic as they have worked hard to overcome issues and seem to be amenable to correction and direction...but just because I see a glass half full doesn't mean it isn't half empty.
- Maine Campus Compact clearly has experience in dealing with federal and state funding and how grants must be managed and reported, including in the first three year grant for this program. This is supported by the success of the VISTA program. Match requirements are met. Program's prior track record is good, although I believe they had difficulty recruiting members, something not unexpected given the then low unemployment rate.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- Concerned regarding the in kind element and the unresolved issues re: Window Dressers
- Fixed cost grant, so not as much budget detail. Unlike some past grants where the match included cash, this proposal is highly reliant on in-kind from Window Dressers which introduces some uncertainty since that program is currently in abeyance due to the pandemic emergency. It will have to restart once this is past, which introduces some uncertainty.

Fiscal Systems

- I feel like the strength is there and the delivery is where the hiccups have been, but confidence is high in this category.

- The University of Southern Maine provides the necessary fiscal systems to manage this program and has significant experience in handling federal grants.

Do you think that this applicant would be effective in this category of grant? YES (unanimous)

- the elements for success are there but I would defer to staff opinions and fellow TF members as to whether details such as the vagueness of declared sites, the concerns expressed by peer reviewers regarding what the actual impact/benefit on low income and older adults, the unanswered COVID19 related questions regarding in kind & Window Dressers.
- Past experience running a very similar program successfully. They have also improved the program by greater emphasis on working with low and moderate homeowners to introduce them to partners that can more universally address energy conservation issues and focusing on recruiting low/moderate income individuals into the Member slots and interesting them in potential green job employment.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

No major elements. Inconsistencies noted in previous remarks.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- I am supportive of the program but only if there is confidence by staff and other TF members that the concerns and blanks can be addressed and filled in. Whether that means recommending with requirements or delaying I am unable to decide.
- Only weaknesses are that the program does not address a Commission priority area, some of their effectiveness evidence is a bit old, although now supplemented with more recent support, and they have only identified 2 of the proposed 6 sites. As noted, each time I have seen this application, it has improved.

NOTE: The concerns/blanks to be filled in are noted under Corrections/Conditions earlier in this report.